

November 2, 2005: NORTON FINDS A WAY TO GET FEDERAL COURTHOUSE ANNEX HERE NAMED FOR JUDGE BRYANT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 2, 2005 NORTON FINDS A WAY TO GET FEDERAL COURTHOUSE ANNEX HERE NAMED FOR TRAILBLAZING JUDGE BRYANT

Washington, DC—After more than two years of repeated effort, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) today managed a bill that will name the new annex of the federal courthouse here for Federal District Court Judge William B. Bryant, the first African American to serve as Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court, and the first African American Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia. The House passed the legislation as an amendment to S. 1285, a Senate bill to honor another great African American pioneer, Rosa Parks. The Bryant naming bill moved after Sen. John Warner (R-VA) broke a logjam in the Senate and succeeded in adding the Bryant amendment to a bill naming a federal building in Detroit after Parks. The House followed suit by approving the amended bill this afternoon.

The annex of the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Building, located at 3rd and Constitution Avenue, NW, houses the U. S. District Court and the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals. The 94-year old Bryant, who remains a Senior Judge of the District Court, is a longtime D.C. resident and graduate of the D.C. Public Schools, whose distinguished legal career was established in segregated D.C. in the 1940s and 1950s. Norton got the annex naming bill passed in the House last session, but it was held in the Senate. Chief Judge Thomas Hogan of the U.S. District Court visited Norton in 2004 to ask for the designation at the request of all of the judges of his court.

In her statement on the floor today, Norton said of Bryant and Parks, "Both are legendary African Americans, and the agreement that federal buildings should be named in their honor is both wide and deep." She said that Congress had broken precedents, both with Parks and with Bryant, because Rosa Parks has become the first woman to lie in honor at the Capitol Rotunda, and Judge Bryant has received a rare honor for a judge who is still sitting.

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I rise in strong support of S. 1285, a bill to designate the federal building located at 333 Mt. Elliott Street, in Detroit, Michigan as the Rosa Parks Federal Building. This bill also contains a provision to name the annex to the E. Barrett Prettyman courthouse here in the District of Columbia in honor of Federal District Court Judge William B. Bryant. Both are legendary African Americans, and the agreement that federal buildings should be named in their honor is both wide and deep. I thank my good friend and colleague Representative Carolyn Kilpatrick for her diligent leadership on the Rosa Parks Federal Building designation. I especially want to thank my good friend of long standing, the senior senator from Virginia, Senator John Warner, for tirelessly working with me for more than two years to achieve this honor for Judge Bryant. I am deeply grateful as well to Senate Judiciary Committee Ranking Member Patrick Leahy who also was particularly conscientious in pressing for this honor for Judge Bryant.

I spoke on just last Wednesday concerning the events that led Rosa Parks to challenge the daily humiliation in Montgomery, Alabama's Black residents, who were required to pay their fare to the driver, then get off and re-enter through the rear door, and then relinquish their seat and move to the back of the bus upon the demand of any white passenger. Since then, Congress has broken with precedent and voted to allow Rosa Parks to lie in honor at the Capitol Rotunda, the first woman and only the second African American who has been accorded this honor. In so doing, the United States of America recognized the unique and extraordinary contribution of Rosa Parks to her country. Her simple act of civil disobedience in refusing to relinquish her seat on the demand from a white man on a segregated bus was the functional equivalent of a non-violent shot heard around the world. Fifty years later, time may blur the enormous personal risk Rosa Parks took on in America in 1955. During our country's tragic history, Black men had been lynched for less.

Grievances like those of African Americans, after 400 years of slavery and humiliating discrimination, had been resolved by violent revolution throughout human history. Our country is enormously in Rosa Parks's debt because the revolution that led to the end of government and legally sanctioned discrimination began with a non-violent revolutionary act, setting an example that endured. So brave was her act in the South, that even those of us who were young, in

school, and had nothing to lose did not engage in the first sit-ins until five years later. The act of one woman finally led to the first mass movement, the missing ingredient in the civil rights struggle. This movement was Rosa Parks's special gift to her people and to those who joined them, especially the residents of the District of Columbia, who still feed from her inspiration to achieve equality with other Americans, including equal voting rights in the Congress. In an era of peacock leaders who strut their stuff, her selfless example is an important guide. In great humility, Rosa Parks's gift was not the message that I am doing this to free you. Her message was far more direct: Free Yourself. It is with gratitude that we bring this bill forward today in that spirit.

The significance of Rosa Parks's peaceful defiance of segregation, however, went well beyond her impact on the great men and women who led our movement. The act of one gentle woman led to the first mass movement for equal rights, and it was so large, so insistent, and so effective that its demands became impossible to refuse.

The honor for Judge William Bryant has an unusual origin. The Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, for himself and the members of the trial court, visited my office to request that the annex under construction for the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Building be named for senior U.S. District Court Judge William B. Bryant. Judge Bryant was unaware of the desires and actions of his colleagues, who unanimously agreed to request that the annex be named for the Judge. It is rare that Congress names a courthouse or an annex for a judge who has served in that court and even more rare for a judge who is still sitting. All who have been involved in this effort recognize and agree that giving an honor for a sitting judge has been granted rarely and should be reserved only for the most extraordinary of judges. Judge William Bryant is such a judge. However, I am particularly grateful that this House early on understood the unique importance of Judge Bryant's contributions and passed the bill last session.

Judge Bryant's colleagues, who know his work and his temperament best, have found a particularly appropriate way for the court, our city and our country to celebrate the life and accomplishments of a great judge. I know Judge Bryant personally, I know his reputation in this city and in the law, and I know that the request to name the annex for Judge Bryant reflects deep respect for his unusually distinguished life at the bar.

Judge Bryant began his career in private practice in the segregated Washington of the 1940s and 1950s, when African American lawyers were barred from membership in the District of Columbia Bar Association and even from using the bar law library. He established his legal reputation as a partner in the legendary African American law firm of Houston, Bryant and Gardner and taught at Howard University Law School. His reputation as an extraordinary trial lawyer led to his appointment as the first African American Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia. He rose to become the first African American to serve as Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court, whose members now ask that the annex be named for Judge Bryant.

For his representation of criminal defendants in private practice, Judge Bryant was admired as one of the city's best and most respected lawyers. Among his many notable cases is the landmark *Mallory v. United States*, 354 U.S. 449 (1957), wherein the Supreme Court ruled that an arrested person must be promptly brought before a judicial officer.

Judge Bryant was born in Wetumpka, Alabama, but grew up in the city and graduated from D.C. public schools, Howard University and Howard Law School, where he was first in his class. After graduation, Judge Bryant served as chief research assistant to Dr. Ralph Bunche when Bunche worked with Gunnar Myrdal, the famous Swedish economist, in his studies of American racial issues. Judge Bryant served in the U.S. Army during World War II and was honorably discharged as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1947.

Judge Bryant, who is 94, took senior status in 1982. As Chief Judge Thomas Hogan wrote, the Judge, "lost his beloved wife, Astaire and now lives alone—with this Court and the law as the center of his life." This unusual request from all the judges of the court gives our bill great credibility. I am grateful to the judges of our U.S. District Court here for the thoughtful proposal that honors a Washingtonian of historic proportions. I very much appreciate the many efforts of my friends in the Senate, especially Senators Warner and Leahy. The residents of this city, the court that Judge Bryant has served so well, and the members of the bar here join me in gratitude for this tribute.